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AUTHOR Mink, Iris Tan; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Cluster analytic studies of the home environment of 115 trainable mentally retarded (TMR) and 218 educable. mentally retarded (EMR) and educationally handicapped (EH) children revealed two taxonomies. In homes with TMR children, there were five family clusters or life styles, while homes with EMR-EH children had seven family clusters. Criterion analysis revealed significant differences between types on family and child characteristics. Three of the clusters in each taxonomy were highly similar. Both the cohesive, harmonious family (TMR) and the child-oriented, concordant family (EMR-EH) were considered growth promoting for the developing child. Similarities were also noted for the TMR and EMR-EH low disclosure, unharmonious families and for the two disadvantaged groups. (CL)

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Comparison of Family Life Styles in Homes with Slow-learning and Severely Retarded Children

Iris Tan Mink

C. E. Meyers

Kazuo Nihira

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Abstract

Cluster analytic studies of the home environment of mentally retarded children reveal two taxonomies. In homes with TMR children, there are five family clusters or life styles, while homes with slow-learners have seven family clusters. Criterion analysis reveals significant differences between types on family and child chracteristics. Three of the clusters in each taxonomy were highly similar. Possible explanations for similarity and disimilarity are discussed as are suggestions for future research.

Comparison of Family Life Styles in Homes

with Slow-Learning and Severely Retarded Children

Until the last decade the primary focus of family research was on such structural variables as marital status and family size, on socioeconomic indicators as place of residence, family income, parental education and occupation, and on demographics such as age of family members, ethnicity, religious and political affiliation. While all of these variables were important descriptors of the family, continuing research indicated that by themselves, they did not provide a complete picture of the family. It appeared that crucial knowledge of family functioning lay elsewhere. A good candidate for "elsewhere" was the overall atmosphere or characteristics of the home environment--the values, attitudes and behaviors that were emphasized, encouraged and rewarded--in short, the style of life that was valued in the family.

The systematic study of families with retarded children dates back to the late fifties and early sixties with the work of Bernard Farber and his associates (Farber, 1958; 1960; Farber, Jenne, and Toigo, 1960; Farber and Jenne, 1963). Farber and his associates focused on the impact and response of the family to the birth of a severely retarded child. They studied both structural variables (family status, size and socioeconomic status) and dynamic variables (family and marital integration, and parental attitudes). They did not focus on such psychosocial variables as reinforcement practices in the home or child-rearing attitudes and practices.

In our work we have focused on three different areas of family life style: 1) environmental process or reinforcement practices of the home, 2) environmental press or psychosocial climate of the home as perceived by the parents, and 3) child-rearing attitudes and practices (Nihira, Mink, & Meyers, 1983).

We selected instruments in these areas and used variables from them to describe the overall climate or life style of the home and to determine whether there were different types of family life style. Once we had determined the different types, we asked if there were differences between the types in characteristics of the family and child and in the behavior of the child at home and at school.

To give you some history, our study was part of a program project grant designed to investigate the developmentally disabled child at home and at school. The focus was on the effects of home environment on child development. Our emphasis was the overall atmosphere or psychosocial climate of the home and its relationship to child behavior.

As we collected data we began to read through the interviewer reports and ethnographic notes, it became obvious that there were, besides the general trends for the total sample, several patterns among the psychosocial variables. That is, there were different types of life styles among our families. Just what these patterns were, other than in broad terms, was difficult to determine. Accordingly, we searched for a statistical technique to help us determine whether we had different types, and if so just what was the nature of these types.

The statistic of choice in the determination of types is cluster analysis. This is an objective method for developing a classification system from multivariate data. In brief, cluster analysis determines the different types or clusters by maximizing intergroup differences while maximizing intragroup similarities. There are many different cluster analytic techniques, we chose the K - means clustering procedure, an iterative partitioning method (Anderberg, 1973; Engleman & Hartigan, 1981; Everitt, 1980).

Method

Subjects

We had two samples, one consisted of 115 trainably mentally retarded

children (TMR) and their families, the other was composed of 218 families with slow-learners from programs for the educably mentally retarded (EMR) and educationally handicapped (EH) (Mink, Nihira, and Meyers, 1983; Mink, Meyers, and Nihira, Note 1).

In the TMR sample father-figures were present in 84 percent of the families; over 47 percent of the mothers were employed. The average family socioeconomic level was 48.0 on the Duncan scale. The average number of children in the homes, under age 18, was 2.5 (see total column in Table 4).

Almost 48 percent of the TMR children had Down syndrome. 57 percent were male and the average age was 12.7 years. Ethnic composition was 79 percent white, 3 percent black, 16 percent Hispanic, and the remaining 2 percent other. The average IQ was 41.5.

The EMR-EH sample had father-figures present in 76 percent of the families and almost 45 percent of the mothers were employed. The average family socioeconomic level was 38.0 on the Duncan. The average number of children, under 18 years, was 3.0 (see total column in Table 5).

A little over 24 percent of the slow-learning children were in EH placement. 59 percent were male and the age was 12.4 years. With regard to ethnic composition 67 percent were white, 14 percent were black, 14 percent were Hispanic, and the remaining 5 percent were other. The average IQ was 69.6.

Instruments

We employed standardized instruments whenever possible. To assess the reinforcement aspects of the home environment we used the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME; Bradley and Caldwell, 1979) for the TMR sample and the Henderson Environmental Learning Process Scale (HELPS; Henderson, Bergan, and Hunt, 1972) for the EMR-EH sample. To measure the

psychosocial climate of the HOME we employed the Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos, Insel, and Humphrey, 1974). Assessment of child-rearing attitudes and practices was accomplished with the Home Quality Rating Scale (HQRS; Meyers, Mink, and Nihira, Note 2). These instruments were employed in the cluster analysis phase of the studies (see Table 1 for list of variables in each instrument).

In order to ascertain whether there were differences between the family types on variables other than the above, we collected information on family and child characteristics and on child behavior at home and at school. Interviewer questions provided basic demographic data and measures of family and child adjustment (About Your Child; Mink, Nihira, and Meyers, Note 3). Also employed were a modified form of the Schedule of Recent Experience (Holmes and Rahe, 1967, an abbreviated form of the Adaptive Behavior Scale (ABS; Nihira, Foster, Shellhaas, and Leland, 1974), the Primary Self-Concept Inventory (Muller and Leonetti, 1974) for TMRs only, the Self-Esteem Behaviors (Coopersmith, 1975) and the Teacher Rating Scale (Agard and Kaufman, Note 4).

In addition to these instruments we collected yearly interviewer comments for all families in the sample. We also obtained, from a selected number of families, ethnography and in-depth interviews.

Procedures

Cluster analyses were performed using the variables from HOME or HELPS, FES and HQRS. Once the cluster analyses were completed, we determined differences between the clusters on family and child characteristics and behavior, using analysis of variance or chi-square, whichever was appropriate.

Results

Cluster Analyses

For the TMR sample, cluster analysis revealed five distinctive types of families: the cohesive, harmonious family, the control-oriented, somewhat

unharmonious family; the low-disclosure, unharmonious family, the child-oriented, expressive family; and the disadvantaged family with low morale (see Table 2).

The cluster analysis for the EMR-EH sample yielded seven distinctive types of families: the child-oriented, concordant family; the learning-oriented, somewhat discordant family; the low-disclosure, unharmonious family; the disadvantaged family with little concern for the child; the achievement-oriented non-learning supportive family, the expression-oriented family with few socio-cultural interests; and the outer-directed family with little achievement orientation (see Table 3).

Criterion Analysis

Looking at Tables 4 and 5, you can see that we obtained significant differences on many of the family and child characteristics and behaviors.

Comparison of Typologies

In the short amount of time we have, I want to focus on three types in each typology. Even though the instrument measuring the reinforcement aspects of the environment is different for the TMR and the EMR-EH samples, the instruments measuring environmental press and child-rearing practices are the same for both samples so that some comparison is possible.

Looking at Figure 1, you will notice that the cohesive, harmonious family (TMR) compares favorably with the child-oriented, concordant family EMR-EH). Both of these family types are considered growth-promoting for the developing child. Perusal of the profiles reveals major differences on Concordance, Residential Environment and Residential Area. The difference on the latter two variables may lie in the disparity in socioeconomic level, 48.5 for these TMR families compared to 36.3 for these EMR-EH families. The Concordance difference is not so easily understood. This variable is greatly influenced by absence of a father-figure; however, the four percentage points difference between

the two family types is not sufficient to explain the difference. More fruitful speculation appears to lie in the descriptions of the fathers and children. TMR fathers are older, better educated, and have higher status occupations than EMR fathers. Could it be that they are more likely to be vocal about any differences in child-rearing practices that they might have with their mates? Other than the obvious difference of IQ, TMR children are more likely to be female and less likely to be white, additionally, 31 percent of TMR mothers work compared to 48 percent EMR-EH mothers.

The profiles for the TMR and EMR-EH low-disclosure, unharmonious families (see Figure 2) are not similar on FES, but are quite similar on HQRS. Differences between the two types on the measure of psychosocial climate (FES focuses on relationships, personal growth, and organizational structure of the family) may be largely due to the socioeconomic level (49.4 for TMR, vs. 37.0 for EMR-EH). This is further reflected in the description of the mother, 57 percent of TMR mothers work compared to only 37 percent of the EMR-EH mothers. TMR mothers are also better educated, 71 percent report education beyond high school as compared to 53 percent of the EMR-EH mothers. Ethnicity may be a factor, 86 percent of TMR children were white, compared to 58 percent of EMR-EH children. Also, more TMR children were rated as having a negative influence on the marriage (29% vs. 7%). Additionally, only 29 percent of TMR children are male in contrast to 84 percent of the EMR-EH children.

A comparison of the two disadvantaged family profiles reveals a striking difference or Intellectual-cultural and active-recreational orientation, and a disparity on Concordance, otherwise the two profiles are fairly similar. Inspection of family and child characteristics reveals that father-figures in the TMR groups have attained more education (46 percent vs. 27 percent, beyond h.s.), more EMR-EH mothers work (50 percent vs. 33 percent), and there are somewhat

more male EMR-EH children (56 percent vs. 42 percent). The difference on Intellectual-cultural and active-recreational orientation may simply be due to the difference on the IQ and level of functioning of the children in these two types. The IQ of the TMR children was 36.9, whereas the IQ of the EMR-EH children was 70.6.

Conclusions

Cluster analyses of families with TMR and EMR-EH children reveal typologies of five and seven family types, respectively. Comparison of the two typologies indicates that in each typology there are three types that are quite similar. While this comparison does not constitute a replication, we feel reasonably confident that certain family types may emerge regardless of the degree of handicap of the mentally retarded child.

The cohesive, harmonious family (TMR) and the child-oriented, concordant family (EMR-EH) are considered to be good homes; that is, they are growth-promoting for the child. Parents in these homes appear to have resolved the "crisis" of bearing a retarded child have "gotten on" with the task of rearing their child. From ethnographic notes and interviewer reports, these parents come across as competent, and realistic, and caring. They generally avail themselves of whatever services the community offers for their child. They also appear to enjoy the company of their child. The children, who have relatively undistinguished IQ's compared to their respective groups (EMR-EH have lowest IQ's of the 7 types), function well adaptively both at home and at school. Teachers report them to have good self-esteem.

The two low disclosure, unharmonious family types are problematic from both the standpoint of research and in terms of psychological distress in the family. Parents were so unwilling to disclose information, that this investigator wonders why they continued to participate over the four years of

data gathering. Also, some interviewers reported that the parents appeared to give "socially desirable" answers. It is our belief that this lack of openness does not constitute a deliberate attempt to mislead the interviewer. Rather, it stems from an unwillingness to confront the child's retardation. It is interesting to note that these children had the highest IQ's in their respective groups. Parental denial does not seem to adversely affect the child. These children usually scored highest in measures of adaptive behavior and adjustment at home and at school.

One of our colleagues suggests that this is an at-risk family, that parental distress may be approaching a critical point. He feels that an outreach program with a therapeutic component could help alleviate the shame, guilt, and distress of these parents.

While the two disadvantaged family types resemble each other on psychosocial climate of the home and child-rearing attitudes and practices, there are some differences in family and child characteristics which indicate differential treatment. The TMR family is characterized as demoralized; some of this evaluation comes from interviewers notes, however, most of it comes from the below mean scores for almost all of the psychosocial variables, particularly scores on the HOME, the measure of reinforcement practices in the home. Children in these homes had very low adaptive behavior, high maladaptive behavior, and low self-esteem. Even so, 92 percent of the homes had a father-figure present, so there is some stability. It is our belief that an outreach program concentrating on parenting skills, home enrichment, and introduction to community resources would greatly benefit these families.

The EMR-EH family type is labeled "Disadvantaged family with little concern for the child." There is an absence of learning reinforcement in this type of home. The label "socio-cultural retardation" may be appropriate for this type.

Children have IQ's of 70.6, yet do poorly at school where they are often disruptive. Interviewer notes reveal a pattern of consecutive "live-in" boyfriends and dependence on SSI for some of the mothers. However, more intensive study of this family type is necessary before any treatment recommendations can be made.

We have discovered family types in both TMR and EMR-EH homes. Certain of these types appear in both groups of homes. We have also demonstrated that there are significant differences between the types on family and child characteristics and behavior. In conclusion though, I would like to quote from Cattell (Cattell, Coulter, and Tsujioka, 1966, p. 293): "There are two main problems to be handled with types: 1) Finding them, and 2) using them (descriptively, predictively, or in contributing to scientific understanding)." I believe that we have been successful in "finding" types for families with mentally retarded children. Now, we must endeavor to "use" them.

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Table 1

PSYCHOSOCIAL MEASURES OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

I. Environmental process of reinforcement aspects of the home

A. Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME; Bradley and Caldwell, 1979)

1. Stimulation through toys, games, and reading material
2. Language stimulation
3. Pysical environment: safe, clean, and conducive to development
4. Pride, affection, and warmth
5. Stimulation of academic behavior
6. Modeling and encouraging of social maturity
7. Variety of stimulation
8. Physical punishment

B. Henderson Environmental Learning Process Scale (HELPS; Henderson, Bergan and Hurt, 1972)

1. Extended interests and community involvement
2. Provision of a supportive environment for school learning
3. Educational expectations and aspirations

II. Psychosocial climate of the home

A. Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos, Insel and Humphrey, 1974)

1. Expressiveness
2. Achievement orientation
3. Moral-religious emphasis
4. Control
5. Cohesion, independence, and organization vs. conflict
6. Intellectual-cultural and active-recreational orientation

III. Child-rearing attitudes and practices

A. Home Quality Rating Scale (HQRS; Meyers, Mink and Nihira, 1977)

1. Harmony of the home and quality of parenting
2. Concordance in parenting and marriage
3. Openness and awareness of the respondent
4. Quality of the residential environment
5. Quality of the residential area

Table 2

Typology of TMR Families

Cluster 1: Cohesive, harmonious family (N = 35)

Cluster 2: Control-oriented, somewhat unharmonious family (N = 34)

Cluster 3: Low-disclosure, unharmonious family (N = 7)

Cluster 4: Child-oriented, expressive family (N = 27)

Cluster 5: Disadvantaged family with low morale (N = 12)

Table 3

Typology of EMR-EH Families

Cluster A: Child-oriented, concordant family (N = 23)

Cluster B: Learning-oriented, somewhat discordant family (N = 58)

Cluster C: Low-disclosure, unharmonious family (N = 19)

Cluster D: Disadvantaged family with little concern for the child (N = 18)

Cluster E: Achievement-oriented, non-learning supportive family (N = 39)

Cluster F: Expression-oriented family with few socio-cultural interests (N = 27)

Cluster G: Outer-directed family with little achievement orientation (N = 34)

Table 4
Description of TMR Family and Child: Percents and Means
(Some selected variables)

Variable	Cluster					Total	Test of Significance	
	1	2	3	4	5		Overall	Pairwise[b]
Percent Father-Figures Present	82.9	91.2	100.0	66.7	91.7	83.5	X^2= 8.97^{+}	2≠4**
Percent Father-Figures Help with Childcare	89.7	100.00	100.0	94.1	72.7	92.6	X^2= 9.84*	2≠5*
Percent Mothers Who Work	31.4	67.7	57.1	46.2	33.3	47.4	X^2=10.41*	1≠2**;2≠4^{+},5^{+}
Percent of Existing Relationships Where Child has a Negative Influence[a]	0	12.9	28.6	5.9	18.2	9.5	X^2=16.12*	1≠2*,3**,5*;3≠4^{+}
Mean Family Socio-Economic Level (Duncan)	48.5	52.3	49.4	47.9	34.8	48.0	F = 1.25	
Mean Number of Children in Home Under Age 18	2.9	2.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.5	F = 1.08	
Mean Occurrence of Stressful Life Events	56.4	62.5	122.3	84.0	86.3	71.8	F = 3.22*	1≠3;2≠3
Percent Down Syndrome	65.7	38.2	42.9	44.4	33.3	47.8	X^2= 6.95	1≠2**,4^{+}
Percent Male	45.7	82.4	28.6	51.9	41.7	56.5	X^2=14.44**	1≠2**;2≠3*,4*,5*
Percent White	65.7	88.2	85.7	96.3	50.0	79.1	X^2=16.69**	1≠2^{+},4**;2≠5*;4≠5**
Mean Age	12.7	12.6	12.8	12.7	12.9	12.7	F = .06	
Mean IQ	40.7	41.9	47.4	42.3	36.9	41.5	F - 1.37	3≠5*
Mean General Social Adjustment	41.0	37.8	43.1	40.7	37.1	39.7	F = 2.85*	1≠2,5;2≠3,4;3≠5;4≠5
Self-Esteem (Teacher Rating)	19.1	16.8	19.0	18.0	16.3	17.8	3.44**	1≠2,5
Self-Concept: Peer Acceptance	2.2	1.8	2.0	1.1	1.4	1.7	3.48**	1≠4

$^{+}p < .10$
$^{*}p < .05$
$^{**}p < .01$
$^{***}p < .001$

[a] There were three response levels: Negative, Neutral and Positive (X^2 has 12 df)

[b] Level of significance: for X^2 as noted, for Duncan's Multiple Range Test $\alpha = .05$ on all comparisons

Table 5

Description of EMR-EH Family and Child: Percents and Means
(Some selected variables)

Variable	Cluster							Total	Test of Significance
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G		Overall
Percent Father-Figure Present	87.0	69.0	89.5	83.3	76.9	70.4	70.6	75.7	X^2= 6.47
Percent Father-Figure Helps With Childcare	95.0	84.6	81.3	66.7	96.4	100.0	91.7	88.8	X^2=13.82*
Percent Mothers Who Work	47.8	41.4	36.8	50.0	48.7	51.9	38.2	44.5	X^2= 2.27
Percent Relationships-Child has Negative Influence[a]	0	5.1	6.7	13.3	7.1	0	4.3	5.1	X^2=11.95
Percent Families-Good Parent-Child Relations[a]	82.6	86.2	68.4	72.2	79.5	74.1	76.5	78.9	X^2=22.59*
Mean Family Socioeconomic Level (Duncan)	36.3	41.2	37.0	31.4	36.3	37.7	40.6	38.0	F = .64
Mean Number of Children in Home Under Age 18	2.4	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.7	2.5	3.4	3.0	F = 3.62**
Mean Occurrence of Stressful Life Events	100.6	103.9	138.7	149.2	103.2	93.1	147.7	115.7	F = 2.10*
Percent Male	65.2	39.7	84.2	55.6	61.5	66.7	64.7	58.7	X^2=15.60*
Percent White	73.9	77.6	57.9	61.1	53.8	74.1	58.8	66.5	X^2= 9.03
Mean Age	12.0	12.6	12.6	13.2	12.2	12.0	12.7	12.4	F = 1.91+
Mean IQ	66.3	69.6	74.6	70.6	68.5	71.2	69.5	69.8	F = 1.30
Mean Psychological Adjustment	4.1	3.9	4.2	3.3	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.9	F = 2.06+
Mean General Social Adjustment	39.5	38.0	38.7	33.3	36.2	35.8	37.7	37.7	F = 2.35*
Percent in EH Placement in First Study Year	21.7	25.9	36.8	27.8	17.9	22.2	23.5	24.3	X^2= 2.83
Mean Social Self-Concept	30.0	29.4	31.1	31.8	29.2	27.7	29.4	29.6	F = 2.02+
Mean Potential to Benefit from Further Education	11.0	10.5	8.3	10.3	10.7	10.4	9.8	10.4	F = 2.46*

+ $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

[a] There were three response levels (X^2 has 12 df)

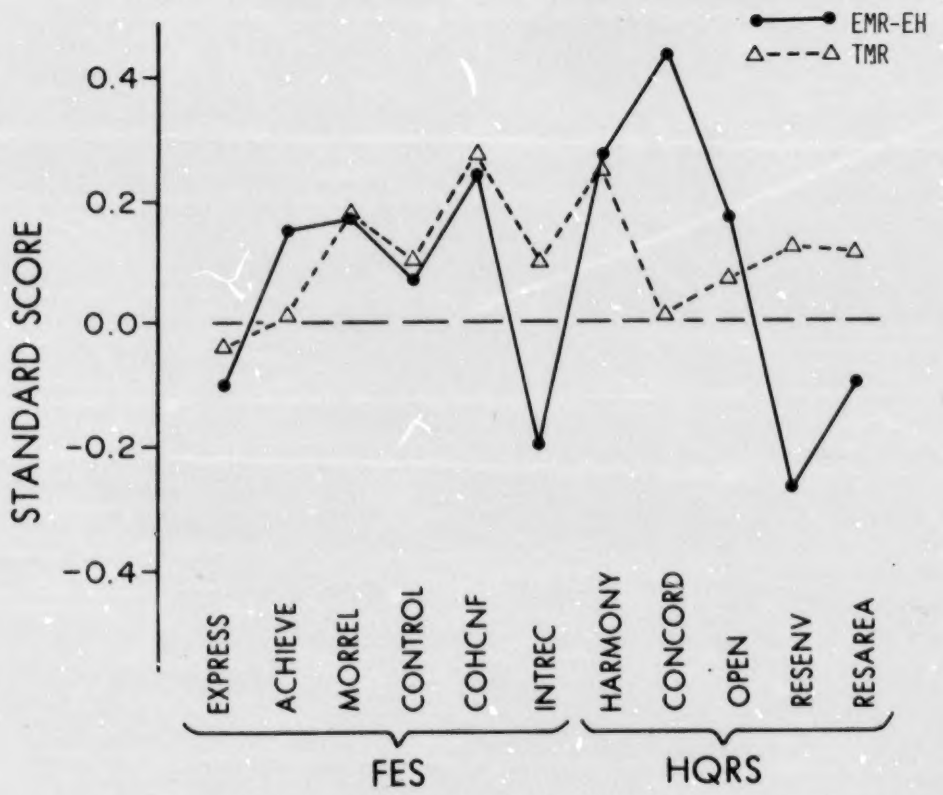

FIGURE 1: Cohesive, harmonious family (TMR) vs. Child-oriented, concordant family (EMR-EH)

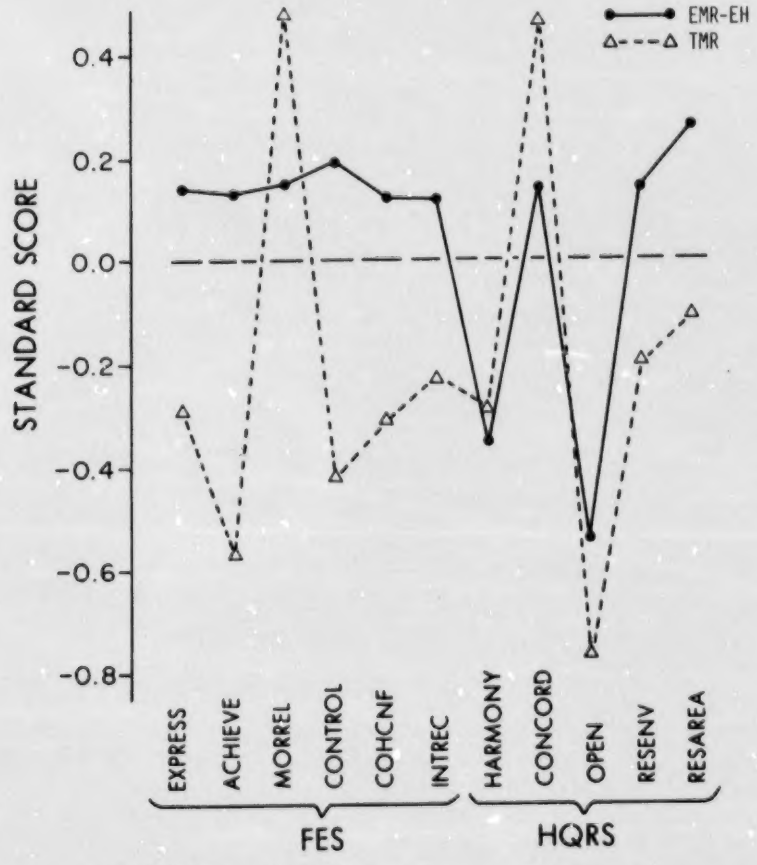

FIGURE 2: Low-disclosure, unharmonious families (TMR vs. EMR-EH)

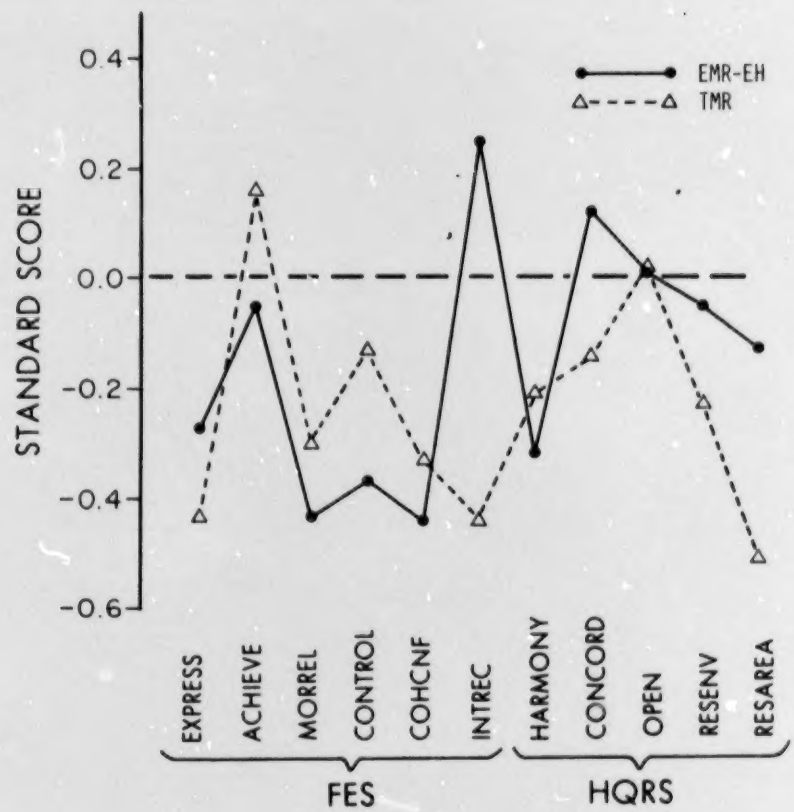

FIGURE 3: Disadvantaged family with low morale (TMR) vs. Disadvantaged family with little concern for the child (EMR-EH)